

ISLAM

God has multiple attributes

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Towards the end of his commentary on the chapter of the Quran entitled "The Night Journey", Ibn Kathir has related the following incident: "A person heard the Prophet supplicating God by His names Rahman (the Beneficent) and Rahim (the Merciful). 'I thought that he called on only one God,' the man commented. 'Yet, here he is, calling on two.'" From this straightforward incident one can see how many doubts and suspicions stem from a mere lack of understanding. God is One in His essence, but He has multiple names or attributes. The Prophet Muhammad used to call upon his Lord by these names. He was supplicating One God, but using several different names to do so. The person who overheard the Prophet's prayer considered multiplicity of attributes to be an indication of multiplicity of being.

A human being is a tremendously complex being. His life has innumerable, interrelated aspects. That is why it is extremely difficult to form a correct opinion about someone. There is at least a fifty-fifty chance of coming to the wrong conclusion. For this reason one should be very careful in forming opinions about others. It does not matter if one is hasty in forming a good opinion about someone. One has to be meticulously careful, though, in forming bad opinions. First one must look at every aspect of the situation, and then come to a reasoned and sober conclusion on the basis of all the available information. Whenever a person forms an opinion, he does so within the arena of his own knowledge. The bounds of reality, however, are much more extensive than the bounds of any single person's knowledge. One might easily consider an opinion correct, while, in the context of wider realities, that opinion may prove to be quite wrong.

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